
Master Archive: Northfield Allotments (Ealing Dean Common)

Location: Ealing, London, England

Established: 1832

Status: London's Oldest Allotments

1. Timeline of Evolution

Pre-1832: The Common Land

- **Original State:** Known as "Jackass Common" or Ealing Dean Common, the land was primarily woods and waste ground used for donkey races.
- **Legal Shift:** Established to help the "labouring poor" avoid the workhouse following the Select Vestries Act (1819) and Enclosure of Wastes Act (1831).

1832–1910: Establishment and "Show Years" ⁵

- **The Bishop's Grant:** In 1832, Bishop Charles James Blomfield ensured the enclosure of ~20 acres for allotments, strictly to be "cultivated with the spade."
- **Social Purpose:** The Bishop intended gardening to be a moral alternative to drinking for "poor parishioners."
- **Horticultural History:** Between 1850 and 1880, plot holders regularly entered the Ealing, Acton & Hanwell Horticultural Society annual shows⁸. Historically recorded crops included potatoes, "underground onions," and hardy annuals⁹.

1910–2000: Decline and Loss

- **Dean Gardens (1910):** A portion of the west-side allotments was converted into public pleasure gardens.

- **The "Lost Plots" (1970s):** Over 50% of the site (plots numbered 1-145) was lost to housing developments under compulsory purchase orders.
- **Neglect Period:** During the 1980s and 90s, the site had no waiting lists, and many plots were overgrown or unrented.

2000–Present: Modern Resurgence

- **Self-Management:** In 2014, the Ealing Dean Allotment Society (EDAS) was formed to manage the site.
- **Campaigning:** A 2016–2019 campaign successfully fought off proposed housing developments on the northern section of the site.

2. Archaeological Artifacts (Historic Finds)

Victorian & Edwardian Era (1860s–1910s)

- **W.B. Hieatt Fragments:** Embossed glass from a local grocer and wine merchant located opposite the allotments in the 1880s.
- **Clay Pipes:** Finds include a pipe bowl dated c. 1780 near Mattock Lane and a 1902 Coronation pipe for Edward VII and Alexandra²⁰.
- **Currency:** Artifacts include an 1869 penny found on the "Bee plot" and various Victorian "Bun head" pennies (1860–1894).
- **Poison & Potion Bottles:** Ribbed, tactile glass bottles (c. 1910–1930) designed to be identifiable by touch in the dark.

Mid-20th Century (1930s–1970s)

- **Job's Milk Bottles:** High volume of finds linked to the Leighton Road dairy depot, which operated from 1921 to 1987.
- **Vulcanite Stoppers:** Hard rubber screw-tops used by local breweries and dairies like Royal Brewery Brentford and R. White & Sons.
- **Crisp Packets:** Significant "decimalisation markers" found include pre-decimal 5d

packets and 1970s items like Smiths "Horror Bags" (priced at 3p).

3. Heritage Features

Water Systems

- **Wells:** Because there was no mains water until 1990, plot holders dug at least 15 known wells, often using stacked metal barrels or concrete linings.
- **Storage:** Old baths and metal water tanks were frequently used to store rainwater.

Restored Structures

- **Restored Sheds:** Restorations have uncovered original features like orange bitumen wallpaper (1970s shed) and vintage tools from the 1950s and 60s.
- **Gate 207:** A handmade gate likely constructed from salvaged timber, found near makeshift fencing made from old bedsteads typical of the 1930s.
- **Anderson Shelter:** A WW2-era shelter was rediscovered and rebuilt by volunteers in 2015.

4. Archival Sources

- **Primary Documents:** 1832 Bishop's Grant (London Metropolitan Archive), Middlesex County Times reports (1887–1901), and 1972 Compulsory Purchase Order maps.
- **Secondary Research:** Paul McConnell's "Pre-1832" history and Ealing Heritage Centre photo archives.